

## **Grand Opening of the STEP Community Action Agency Facility in Patrick County**

□

**June 1, 2010**

□

**Stuart, Virginia**

□

I am pleased to join you in Stuart today in formally cutting the ribbon on STEP Community Action Agency's new location in Patrick County. The new federally funded facility will greatly benefit Patrick County residents by providing a new and modern Head Start classroom for young children and enabling STEP to expand its offering of assistance programs for low- income individuals in the County.

STEP is the non-profit Community Action Agency which provides services in Patrick, Henry, Franklin and Pittsylvania Counties as well as the Cities of Martinsville and Danville. The agency offers 22 programs to improve the quality of life for residents of the region and assist those most in need including housing and weatherization assistance, Indoor Plumbing and Rehabilitation, homelessness prevention services, home delivered meals for senior citizens, and financial services like tax preparation assistance and financial literacy. In addition, STEP operates successful education programs including a Head Start program and Project Discovery, a college preparation program. In December 2009, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services awarded STEP a federal grant of \$1.2 million to begin an Early Head Start program for the region, the largest award of to any similar program in Virginia.

Previously, STEP's operations in Patrick County have been located in two small and aging facilities. Patrick County's Head Start classroom was housed in a basement, which provided a limited opportunity for many of the program's activities. Also, as a result of the inadequate space, STEP could only provide a few of its 22 assistance programs to Patrick County residents—the Head Start program, weatherization services and tax preparation services.

To address this problem, at my urging, the U.S. Department of Agriculture through its Rural Development Agency has provided STEP a total of more than \$1.3 million to construct a new facility in Patrick County. Of that amount, \$50,000 has been provided as a federal grant, and \$1.2 million has been provided in the form of a low-interest federal loan.

With the benefit of the federal funds, a new building to house STEP's Patrick County operations has been constructed. The new facility is 7,200 square feet in size and houses a new and modern Head Start classroom, fifteen staff offices, a full-service commercial kitchen. In addition, the facility includes a large community room, which is fully equipped with video conferencing technology so that STEP can conduct and participate in meetings among its locations and with other agencies without the expense and time associated with travel.

The total cost of the new facility was \$1,362,637. In addition to the federal funds, the Morgan Foundation provided a grant of \$25,000, and the Charles Freauff Foundation provided \$15,000 to complete the project.

STEP has been ready to expand its services in Patrick County but has been unable to do so previously because of inadequate facilities. The new STEP offices in Stuart will remedy this situation. As a result of the new space, STEP will expand most of its 22 programs, most of which are currently unavailable to Patrick County residents, into Patrick County. Also, STEP will be able to more easily work in partnership with other local civic groups and faith-based organizations to provide better services to those in need. In addition, STEP plans to expand its economic development offerings including support services for locally-owned small businesses.

The new facility will also greatly improve STEP's Head Start program. Young students will benefit from the greatly improved learning environment and ample space in the new and modern Head Start classroom. Additionally, STEP is currently constructing another classroom to house the new, federally funded Early Head Start program in Patrick County. The new Early Head Start classroom is expected to be completed and ready to accept new students in July.

STEP's new location in Stuart will become a great asset to residents of Patrick County, and there are several individuals who deserve our thanks today for this success.

I want to thank Rob Shorter, President of the STEP Board of Directors, and the other members of STEP's board for their leadership and foresight in developing a new, full-service location in Patrick County. Jon Morris, Executive Director of STEP, also deserves our thanks today for his tireless work in support of today's success.

I also want to thank Jimmy McHone, Mayor of the Town of Stuart, for his efforts to develop STEP's new facility.

Crystal Harris, Chairman of the Patrick County Board of Supervisors, and the other members of the Board of Supervisors deserve our thanks today for their longstanding efforts to improve the quality of life for residents in Patrick County residents with developments like the new STEP facility.

I also want to thank Anne Herring with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Development Agency for her work to secure these federal funds for STEP.

Ward Armstrong and Roscoe Reynolds, who represent Patrick County in the Virginia General Assembly, also deserve our appreciation today for their support of STEP's activities in the region.

I also want to thank Tom Bishop, Executive Director of the Patrick County Chamber of Commerce, for his cooperative efforts in developing the new STEP facility.

I also want to recognize my colleague in the House of Representatives, Tom Perriello, who represents part of STEP's service area in a portion of Henry and Franklin Counties for his support of STEP's efforts.

Finally, I want to thank my Project Manager, Derek Lyall, for his persistent and persuasive efforts in support of this project.

STEP's new location in Stuart is an example of what can be accomplished when citizens and government officials on the local, state and federal levels work together in aid of a common purpose. For that cooperation and successful work, I want to thank all here and offer special congratulations to the Patrick County residents who will benefit from the new STEP services the new building affords.